



HAWAI'I ISLAND HAWKSBILL TURTLE RECOVERY PROJECT 2010 SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

Prepared by Will Seitz, Lauren Kurpita, and Liz Ransom February 2011

Aloha Honu'ea Ohana! The 2010 hawksbill turtle nesting season is pau! For the last nine months, over 40 diehard turtle volunteers and interns tirelessly monitored and managed Hawai'i Island's southern coastline for hawksbill nesting activity and protected endangered turtle nests. This season was highly successful with 39 nests found and protected at six beaches: 'Āpua Point and Halapē (in Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park), and Kamehame, Koloa-Nīnole, Pōhue Bay, and 'Āwili Point outside the park. Additionally, an olive ridley nest was saved from the surf and protected at 'Āwili Point (pictured here).

Similarly to the 2009 season, the 2010 season was one of the longest on record. Honu'ea field season is almost year round now, with this last season extending from April 2010 to mid-January 2011. We identified 12 individual nesting hawksbills and one olive ridley. There were likely more unidentified elusive nesters and nests. Of the 12 hawksbills, seven were returnees from previous seasons, while the other five were newly tagged. These five new recruits now bring the total number of tagged adult female hawksbills on Hawai'i Island to 105. The olive ridley was only the fourth documented olive ridley nest in Hawai'i state history. About 4,000 hatchlings safely reached the ocean from the 40 total nests including the olive ridley. Over 80,000 hatchlings have reached the ocean since the project began in 1989. There is hope for the honu'ea! The following are site summaries:

Āpua Point: One newly tagged turtle laid four nests at this oasis. Families from Kalapana who were camping at the beach were able to observe this nesting turtle. As usual, these hatchlings here were helped across the cobblestones to the ocean. We estimate that over 200 hatchlings reached the water here thanks to volunteer assistance.

Halapē: The most popular backcountry campground in HAVO had two returning nesters that laid ten nests. One of the nesters, Barnacle Betty, was a returnee from 2004. The other turtle was tagged in 2007. Volunteers informed campers who were able to witness nesting turtles and hatchlings. This was especially needed since the nests were located in front of the campsites. Turtle personnel helped put out a wildfire that was accidentally started by campers. Personnel also worked with the Park Maintenance and Vegetation crew and the Wilderness Volunteers to control invasive koa haole that was encroaching on the nesting habitat. An estimated 547 hatchlings reached the ocean from this beach.

Kamehame: Four turtles and 10 nests were documented at this hawksbill nesting mecca. We suspect there were several additional nests as well. Kamehame had the most nesters and nests in the State. Two of the turtles were newly tagged and the other two were returnees. One of them was tagged way back in 1996 and had not been seen for 10 years. The other was seen two years ago, and during the interval was satellite tracked by NOAA residing off leeward Maui. From the 10 nests, we estimate that over 1,345 hatchlings reached the sea. Volunteers also assisted with habitat restoration by removing non-native plants.

Punalu'u: Some community members reported seeing hatchlings near the pavilion at a small pocket beach. However, we were unable to locate a nest here.

Kōloa-Nīnole: One newly identified nesting turtle laid three nests at this site near Punalu‘u. Sadly, all three nests were unsuccessful due to exposure to high tides. In addition, another returning nester was seen here. We suspect that she nested undetected at another nearby beach, Kāwā.

Pōhue Bay: Nine nests from two returning hawksbills were protected and over 1,300 hatchlings reached the ocean at this important nesting site. One of the turtles was a returnee from 2005 and the other from 2007. Interestingly, both of these nesters were sighted by divers off of Maui in the years between nesting seasons. Including the turtle from Kamehame, there were at least three nesters this year that travelled from Maui to nest in Ka‘ū.

‘Āwili Point (Road to the Sea): One newly tagged hawksbill laid three confirmed nests and possibly two more. At least 248 hawksbill hatchlings reached the sea here from two highly successful nests. A third nest was unsuccessful due to heavy rains in the fall. The biggest surprise of the 2010 season was when an olive ridley turtle laid 88 eggs in the tidal inundation zone of the beach (pictured here) and were rescued by volunteers and translocated to higher ground. She was newly tagged. The nest was a huge success with 80 hatchlings safely reaching the ocean thanks to the efforts of the volunteers.

Keauhou, Punalu‘u, Horseshoe, Kahakahakea, Hāli‘ipalala, Humuhumu Point: No nesting was observed at these beaches. Beach checks were limited to daylight hours, so we could have missed signs of nesting activity since wind and tides may erase tracks made during the night.

SPECIAL MAHALO to Minky Markiewicz the last two decades of volunteering for Resources Management Division! THANK YOU! We wish you the best on your new journey. We will miss you!

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